

# The Ties that Bind

by DSK

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Summary: The Covenant has come. Loyalties are to your race first, and your friends second, but what happens when one of ours becomes one of theirs.

## 1. Second Chance

Well hello you lucky people who happen to have stumbled upon this fic. This is the first story I have written however I am no stranger to good fiction and I hope this story lives up to some of what I've read. And here's my little sis Mistress of Azure with the disclaimer.( [http/](http://) Azure: He owns nothing, not Halo (game or otherwise), nor the Idea for a Covi raised human (THAT'S CAUSE HE SUCKS, THAT LOSER!) (DSK: -smacks-), anyway those two belong to Bungie (may their games never suck) and Gin-Ryu respectively. He does, however own the OCs, Drek'nari and Kara, and the actual story of this fic.

Ok for those of you who don't know here are some key terms.

Sangheili - The Covenant name for the Elites

Unggoy - Grunts

Kig-yar - Jackal

Fleet Master - Exactly what it sounds like, the commander of a fleet of ships. Equivalent to the Human Admiral (I believe)

Languages

Human-plain text

Covenant-*Italic text*

## Second Chance

1-2-3-GO

MC: 1200 Hours, September 2, 2537

Nexus V

The harsh noon sun beat down on the POW as they were marched to the center of the square. Waiting there were two-dozen Grunts, their gas rigs gleaming in the light of the twin suns. The Grunts moved restlessly, impatient for the action to begin.

The humans avoided looking at them as best they could, every one of them knowing exactly what this was all about, the military videos had made that fact all too clear. Occasionally when the Covenant captured a settlement they took prisoners, never more than a dozen or so, but enough, then they would be executed in any number of grisly ways. This was one of the most common methods.

Grunt-feeding frenzy.

"Today is a good day to fight." The sudden voice startled many of the weeping soldiers. The Sergeant in charge of Delta Company had spoken up, trying to hearten his soldiers and put the fight back in them. His remark, however, only brought laughing from their escort of Elites.

The prisoners entered the square still weeping and begging for a swift painless death. All save a small girl of fourteen. She stood tall, staring at the Grunts as though she dared them to charge. The Elites laughed as they gave the order to attack.

Two-dozen Grunts charged half their number of humans; unarmed and unarmored, the humans didn't stand a chance and they knew it. Most simply fell to their knees or fainted straight away, a handful fought back, but none with any vigor. Except for grizzled sergeant and the little girl. While he lashed out with his fists at the oncoming aliens she faced down the three Grunts that came for her with grim determination.

As her ravenous attackers came close, she reached beneath the vest of her oversized uniform and pulled a small combat knife from where she had stashed it before being captured. She slashed out at the methane rig on one of the Grunts, the attack severing one of the tubes that carried the cooled methane from the tank on its back. The Grunt squealed and clutched its severed breather, liquid methane bubbling out of the wound.

Its companions halted their advance, now suitably wary of their intended target. As chaos raged around them, the three combatants circled, sizing each other up. Without warning the human attacked, threw her knife at one of the Grunts. She leapt on the fallen Grunt and grabbed its pistol. Rounding on the last one, she pressed the barrel to the creature's skull and pulled the trigger.

Letting the smoking corpse fall to the ground, she looked around. None of her fellow marines were still alive and most of the Grunts were still engrossed with their meals but one had finished and looked to her for seconds. She slammed down the trigger on the pistol and

turned on the would-be attacker. As she lined up the shot an Elite on the perimeter took an interest in the events and fired its own pistol at the girl.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw the shot and had barely enough time to bring her hand up to her face. The bolt of plasma slammed into the barrel of the gun turning it to slag. The child screamed as the molten metal and plasma seared her flesh, lashing out she threw the ruined weapon at the Elite. The weapon fell short by a foot and the Elite laughed looking at the projectile. He kept laughing until the overcharged gun exploded.

When the dust cleared the Elite no longer moved and the Grunt no longer looked hungry. Two of the Elites companions growled at her and charged she looked desperately for a weapon. Her eyes fell on her discarded blade, she leapt for it and was pulled out of midair by her attacker. The other Elite came around to face her, its mandibles twisted into what could have been a smile, or a sneer.

"You have overstepped the bounds of entertainment," he said in a passable human dialect "now I will teach you fear." His companion laughed as he drew his plasma sword. "Perhaps I should skin you alive" he cooed pressing the blade to her cheek. She grimaced as the blade seared her flesh anew. The Elite removed the blade from her cheek and reached for his plasma rifle. Taking the opportunity the last survivor of Delta Company reared back and spit in the eye of unsuspecting Elite. "Why you little," the stunned Elite roared, baring its blade once more. "I'll teach you more than fear. When I'm done with you, you'll beg me to kill you, beg me to just give you to the Kig-yar." He reared back to strike her.

"\_Stand down soldier!"\_ a loud, commanding voice barked from across the square. The voice belonged to an Elite in golden armor, who stood with authority.

"\_Fleet Master,"\_ stammered the Elite as he hastily stowed his blade. "\_I was just showing this vermin proper respect."\_

"\_I saw what you were doing,"\_ the golden Elite said, strolling up to the group leisurely. "\_And I don't approve. There is no point in fighting an unarmed opponent, especially one who should be dead already."\_ The Elite continued plowing over any and all protests. "\_I told you last time I won't tolerate this sort of blood sport."\_ The commander's gesture encompassed the entire courtyard. The human watched this spectacle with growing dread, unable to understand the Elites she could only watch and wonder what they were talking about.

"\_But Fleet Master, the Unggoy desire entertainment."\_ The offending Elite said humbly. "\_This keeps them placated, it keeps them from causing trouble. Anyway, they're just humans."\_ As soon as the words left his mouth, the Elite knew they were the wrong ones.

"\_Well this 'just human', has just put up more fight than any ten of the others."\_ The commander replied quietly. "\_She is young, and strong. At least as strong as some Sangheili."\_ The other Elite flinched at the thinly veiled rebuke. "\_We have found cause to bring lesser beings into the covenant, I say why not let this one have a chance to prove herself, to be purged of what weakness there is and made into something great. Wouldn't you agree?"\_

"\_O-Of course, Fleet Master.\_"

"\_Good,"\_ the Fleet Master said as he pulled his Com uplink from his belt. Bringing up the rosters from all the ships in his command, he began looking through the lists of crew and soldiers. After passing over almost two thousand Sangheili, he happened upon one who might fit the requirements to care for this child. Drek'nari Zoultel was a good soldier, part of an elite black ops unit, and he had served under Orna' Fulsamee long before Fulsamee had become a Fleet Master. Better yet, he had no family and an unlikely record of being generous even to the lower caste.

Fleet Master Orna' sent a request for Zoultel's presence as soon as possible. He turned his attention back to the two Elites and the human whom he had just saved, and wondered if he hadn't just made a very big mistake. One Elite still held the girl off her feet, and she looked more afraid than ever. The other Elite looked like a cornered animal, ready to fight or flee at any moment. \_"Don't you have some work you should get to?"\_ The pair jumped at the sound of his voice, hearing that they were free to go they left far more quickly than was proper, but Fulsamee had already put them out of his mind.

He looked once more at his young charge; he was ultimately responsible for her now. If she caused trouble or turned out to be less than he had thought, the blame, ridicule and dishonor would fall to him. She looked plain enough if one overlooked what she had just done. She was of average height for her age and of a slight build. Her light red-brown hair hung just below her ears and framed a face that may once have been innocent. His inspection came to her eyes; they were crystal blue and without fear. He could see a light deep inside; she was calculating her odds of escape, he realized. There was fear there as well, but it was well hidden, pushed aside and buried beneath cold determination. Fulsamee decided to intervene before this got out of hand. "I wouldn't suggest escape. I don't plan to hurt you, but I can't make assurances for all of my troops." This open declaration of her thoughts clearly startled her, but she recovered quickly enough.

"What do you plan to do with me then?"

"Turn you over to a friend."

"Whose friend? Mine or yours?"

"Both I hope." This he said in a whisper, hoping she would not see his doubt. This child was sharp. She did hear, however, and did see.

"You're nervous," she said carefully, and when he did not speak she went on. "And your not telling me everything." Fulsamee silently cursed the human tongue; it was so much harder to hide emotion when speaking it. Over the hill a plume of dust rose and the Fleet Master was spared explaining. Moments later a ghost rode into view, but Fulsamee hardly needed to see the distinctive black armor of the special ops to know its rider. Zoultel stepped off of the ghost and strolled over to Fulsamee with a deadly, fluid grace. His eyes noticed everything as they surveyed the area, widening only slightly at the sight of the human standing beside Fulsamee.

"\_You requested my presence, Fleet Master."\_

"Yes, and there is no need for formalities between us, Drek'nari."

"As you say, but it's not good for the Unggoy to see anyone talk casually to a Fleet Master."

"Never mind what's good or bad for the Unggoy to see. I need a favor, I need you to take care of this child until I can get a meeting with the prophets."

"I assume there's more to this than just watching her or we'd be talking in our tongue."

"Prepare her for a meeting with the prophets, teach her language, etiquette and any thing else you can think of."

Drek'nari sighed. "How long do I have?"

"You know the prophets. It will take at least a month to get one meeting with Truth much less a second." Drek'nari considered this carefully, before clicking his mandibles in annoyance.

"Why?"

"\_I think she should join us."\_

"\_Are you sure?"\_

Now it was Fulsamee's turn to consider. Long seconds past before he answered. "Yes."

"Very well," Drek'nari replied before turning to the girl who stood silently, waiting. "Come with me." She hesitated, turning to Fulsamee with a questioning look. Fulsamee returned her gaze and was surprised to find something like trust in her eyes. He nodded his assent trying to look reassuring, and silently hoping this human was everything he believed. Smiling, she finally followed Drek'nari to his ghost. He sighed again as the ghost sped off towards a cruiser in the distance. He spared his thoughts a moment longer before going and mounting his own ghost. He had work to do.

1-2-3-

Under the still boiling light of the twin suns, Drek'nari's ghost sped across the arid landscape. He could hardly believe what had just happened. Orna' had done crazy things before; of course, they were usually tactical maneuvers that were later praised as genius, but this, this came very close to heresy. He glanced down at his passenger, a human. The high prophets had decreed that the humans were to be eradicated, and no one ever questioned a prophet, much less one of the high prophets. Usually Drek'nari knew Orna's intent almost before Orna' knew it himself, but now he was in the dark. He did not like to be in the dark.

A few minutes later they arrived at the gravity lift of the Ascendant Justice. Dismounting, Drek'nari motioned for the girl to follow him. He stepped into the lift and keyed his comlink. Moments later a reply came from an Unggoy onboard running the lift. "\_Excellency, there is

an unidentified being on the lift pad with you. What should I do?"\_

Drek'nari replied quickly deciding that the truth was best for now\_. "Activate the lift. The Human is with me by the orders of Fleet Master Fulsamee."\_

"\_O-Ok"\_ the technician on the other end stammered, clearly confused.

"\_You can check with him yourself if you want, but I believe he is busy at the moment."\_ The Unggoy needed no more prodding and seconds later the pair began to ascend into the ship.

As soon as he touched down inside the cruiser, Drek'nari started off towards his room hoping that the human would follow, he didn't need any more attention than he already had. With luck they reached his cabin without any more incidents. He keyed the entry code and stepped inside, glad to be away from the prying eyes of the rest of the ship.

His cabin was simple, if somewhat larger than a standard two-man cabin. It was three meters cube with a pair of bunk beds set into the far wall. Next to the door was a desk with an odd curving chair designed to fit the contours of a Sangheili. On the desk was a standard computer terminal, and on the wall next to the door were the light switch and a COM system. "You're nervous too, like the other one." Drek'nari jumped as the human spoke. He spun to face her.

"Yes, little one, I am nervous, and you should be too."

"Because I'm not suppose to be here, am I?" Drek'nari was surprised by how astute this human was. She had already puzzled out a lot. "But the other one, he's important isn't he? He's in charge around here. Right?"

"Yes, but even he has someone above him." Drek'nari had no idea why he was telling the girl all of this. Then again, Orna' had said to teach her, and that included teaching the dangers of the situation. He needed time to think, he hated not having the answers he needed. "You should rest, little one. If the fighting was half as hard for you as it was for us, you're exhausted. We will talk again in the morning."

"My name is Kara, not little one." She said fixing him with a stare fit to kill.

"Very well Kara, the bottom bed is free." He said pointing at the two beds set into the far wall of the room. The bottom bunk had belonged to a pilot friend of his who had died during the fighting in orbit. He turned and left the room, leaving Kara alone. He needed to think.

Kara waited a moment to be sure he was gone then she removed her boots and lay down on the strange bed. It reminded her of the formfitting gel beds in cryo tubes. She had only travel in slip space once before. When her father had been transferred to Nexus V, her mother had packed up the family and followed.

As she lay there alone she began to sort through the events of the past few days. Days? Or were they weeks? How long had it been since she had seen her family? All she could remember was fighting, endless waves of Grunts and Jackals. Always another target, until last night. The line had broken and they had been overrun, they tried to retreat but it was too late.

Kara lay there a moment longer before realizing that tears had begun their silent flow down her cheeks. She tried to fight them back, she would not let those monsters see her cry, but it was too late. Unbidden, the flow came slowly at first then faster, silent sobs racked through her as she remembered each of the ones she had lost. "Mom, Dad, Kelly" she drifted into silence and finally cried herself to sleep.

1-2-3-

Well there you have it, the first chapter is up. There will be more to come, that I promise to you all two of you out there that actually read this and liked it. Plz no flames I just want reviews, good, honest reviews

Miss Azure: And the first person to flame him I swear, so help me -brandishes giant flyswatter- I'm (semi) friendly with some of the big names on this site! I'm warning you!

## 2. Betrayal

Hello is anyone out there? Hey, you there, yes, you! I recognize you from last chapter. OMG someone came back.

Ok, first things first, notes. Anything I can, I get from the Halo books and games, so for those of you who haven't read the books; 1) the covenant (elites and grunts at least) can speak some English, 2) the books paint the area where Kara's from (the edge of human controlled space near the beginning of the covenant-human war) as a very hostile place, so it's not too much of a stretch to assume that it's a grow up fast environment. (BTW she's more of a conscript than an actual long term trained soldier) Thanks go out to Studley for bringing that up.

Well, since you took time out of your "busy" schedule to read this I might as well get to it.

Disclaimer: I don't own Halo; if I did I would be very, very rich. Nor do I own any of the related characters, locations, etc. I do own my OCs, Kara (and all related peoples) and Dreknari, precioussssssssss.

Sangheili- Elites (do I really need to repeat these?)

Unggoy- Grunts

Fleet Master- Admiral

Languages

Human-plain text

Covenant--Italic text\_

Betrayal

MC: 0600 Hours, September 3, 2537

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara swam through a sea of darkness. Her thoughts conjured images in the blackness—her father, dead at the end of an Elite's sword, Raul throwing himself at the charging Elites, screaming for her to run. She shuddered in the darkness, unable to stem the flow of those memories. She stood before her mother saying she would fight too. Holding the report that said her mother had died to Covenant artillery. She ran through the darkness trying to escape the images, the memories, the pain. Ahead of her a figure emerged from the darkness.

Her mother stood before her, just as she remembered her the day she had left. "You should have been there Kara. I would have lived if you had been there." Her mother said sounding sad and something else. Disappointed?

"What could I have done? I couldn't have done anything. I would have died too!" Kara screamed.

"You could have been there," her mother said simply before fading back into the dark. Another figure came forward hunched over in pain, blood dripping from the wound in its chest. She tried to close her eyes against the sight, but here she could not, again she felt the tears trickle down her face.

"Help me—" her father moaned, the elite's sword still protruding from his chest.

"I can't, I can't help you any more." She whispered fighting back the sobs that threatened to consume her. "You died, I saw you, why can't you leave me alone!" she cried, tears blurring her vision. When the figure spoke again a new voice met her ears, one that she had hoped would not come.

"You betrayed us." Raul's voice washed over her, seeming to come from everywhere and nowhere. "We fought and died to protect our homes, our friends—to protect YOU! But you didn't die. You gave up, you joined them! You're no better than they are." He drew a pistol and pointed it at her. "And now you'll die like them."

"No!" She screamed and looked around for someone, anyone to help her. Then she noticed her hands—they had changed. She gasped as she realized that they were the scaly hands of an elite. Even as she watched, they gripped a plasma rifle and pulled the trigger. Raul screamed as the bolt of plasma burned his face off. Kara screamed to match, sobbing she ran. "I'm sorry Raul, I'm so sorry—" As she ran, a foul laughter rose out of the distance.

Suddenly she stopped. Unable to move forward, she turned to face the source of the laughter. The elite from that afternoon stood there, clutching his sword and what could have been a smile on his face. "Don't worry, they can never hurt you again." He said smoothly. "Because now—you're mine," he reached towards her. "And now, I will



teach you fear." Kara screamed as his blade inched closer to her throat. She couldn't move, all she could do was watch.

"\_Is it all right?"\_ a voice broke through the fog, she could not understand it but she could hear it. Light flooded the darkness and more voices began to filter through.

"Not our problem. Sangheili says watch, we watch, but unless Sangheili says touch we don't touch."

The elite began to fade as Kara awoke. "You can't run forever! We will catch you!" it shrieked before fading entirely.

She opened her eyes slowly; the chamber was dark now. She turned her head to see three stocky figures in the room. Two of the grunts sat near the door facing a third who was standing near the bunk with it's back to her; they were talking. \_"You sure, what if it **\*\*is\*\*** hurt, what then."\_ The first grunt said sounding concerned.

"\_It's not hurt, it would be bleeding if it was hurt. It may be an alien but it still bleeds."\_ The second countered. The third Grunt, who had been silent until now, looked at her and spoke up.

"\_I think it's awake."\_ The other two jumped at this and looked at her. They all looked nervous now.

"Are you alright?" The second Grunt asked, moving a step closer and looked proud of his courage.

"Yes." Kara replied after a minute. "So, where's the big guy?" The Grunts looked shocked that she was talking to them and wasn't trying to kill them.

"Sangheili left, went to get something. Left us in charge, told us to watch you." The quiet one supplied after a minute.

"When will he be back?" The grunts made a strange motion slightly similar to a shrug; she guessed that meant they didn't know. The room settled into an uncomfortable silence, as both parties look uneasily at the others. As she sat there a thought rose to the surface of her mind from the ashes of her nightmare.

"They killed her." A voice hissed in the back of her head. "These grunts were the ones. They killed Kelly." As the words slid over her slick and sickly like rancid oil a vision of Kelly running for her life filled her mind. It had been during the first attacks, they had run from a swarm of grunts. Kelly hadn't made it. "Kill them, kill them all for us." The voice hissed, it sounded like Kelly's. Kara fought the vision down into the depths of her mind, banishing the voice with it. No, she thought, she wouldn't slip back into her nightmare now that she was awake.

The silence dragged on until the tension was palpable. Finally the door hissed open and Drek'nari stepped in side carrying a tray of something. Those eyes saw everything in an instant; Kara suppressed a shudder as they passed over her. "Out." He said suddenly gesturing to the door, "And remember what I said about silence." The three grunts hurried out as Drek'nari pulled the strange chair from the desk over to the bed. He sat down, handing her the tray. "You need to eat." Kara glanced at the food on the tray; she thought she could pick out

some of the things there. There were what appeared blue mushrooms and some type of meat.

"What's that?" She said pointing to the meat.

"Roth, they're native to my home planet."

Kara looked at the utensils and found that they weren't all that different from the ones she had grown up using. Once she realized this it wasn't hard to puzzle out how to use them, she began to eat using the silence to think of what she needed to know. Drek'nari beat her to the punch however, and breached the silence with the last thing on her mind. "You were restless last night. Did you dream of your family?" Kara continued to eat in silence for a moment longer, collecting her thoughts on the matter. She had dreamed of her family, but how much could she afford to tell him? Quickly she discarded this train of thought, she was thinking of him as an opponent. Whatever her standing with him, she was stuck here until these Prophets decided her fate, so she'd better try to make some friends—or at least some allies.

"Yes, I did." She would stick to the truth, but the bare truth unless he asked for more. Thankfully however he let it stand at that; Drek'nari wasn't one to pry into others feelings; especially grief. That was something you had to deal with on your own.

When he said nothing more, Kara decided it was time to learn something. "Why am I here?" Drek'nari was silent, this human, this Kara had a talent for striking the heart of a matter, but he knew what he would say. Last night he had thought on just this question, knowing it would come and knowing his answer must be right the first time. He would not get a second chance. To this end he too had chosen the truth, the whole truth, as far as he knew it.

"Fleet Master Fulsamee believes you are strong enough to join the Covenant. He has always thought highly of his opponents. You are in my care because someone must teach you what you will need to know if you are to succeed in gaining the Prophets favor, as he believes you can. Fulsamee will be very busy even obtaining a meeting with the High Prophet of Truth. That is why I will train you instead of him." There, it was out, all that he knew she knew. He watched as she digested the information, he could see the thoughts swirling in her eyes. Answers being put to questions, other information coming together like peaces of puzzle. Drek'nari had often been told by his subordinates that they could see plans forming in his eyes, that they knew when he understood everything there was to understand, just by the way his eyes looked. He wondered if this is what they meant. At last the shifting stopped and he knew she had cataloged and analyzed what she knew, and that she was going to find out more, even if it killed him.

"What do you believe?" The question startled him; he had not prepared for something like this. It had never occurred to him that his opinion on the situation mattered. He was just a piece on the Sava board 1, what did it matter if a soldier didn't agree with a move made by the player; it didn't have a choice. What was his opinion, what did he believe? Orna' was a friend, a good friend, but he was also Drek'nari's superior. Until now he had followed that superiors orders because that was his duty, but what did Drek'nari Zoultel, long time friend of Orna' Fulsamee, think of his friends

actions and the possible consequences of those actions?

"I don't know." That was all there was to say, he didn't know, and right then he didn't care that this human had just shaken him as he hadn't been shaken in a great many years. Nor did he care that the human knew it, or that he was openly showing a weakness that would have proven fatal in almost any other situation with this same human. To his immense surprise Kara fell silent. She really did want his opinion, he realized.

After this revelation, it didn't take Drek'nari long to pick out what his opinion was. It had been forming slowly over the last few hours, now it crystallized and he knew exactly what he thought. "I think that Orna' is right. You're smart; a lot smarter than most Sangheili I've worked with. If you were half as fast and a fourth as strong, you would outshine 80 of the Sangheili on this ship."

She nodded, taking the compliment in stride. Drek'nari couldn't tell if she trusted him or if she just understood how much she needed them, or maybe she already realized how much Orna' needed her now as well. Either way, she pressed on, moving to the question that should have come after the first. "What will you teach me? What is it that I need to know to succeed with the Prophets?" Her tone was different than before. Before it had been dark, serious. Now it was lighter and filled with something else. Relief? Satisfaction?

"I will teach you language, etiquette, and our customs. When you join the Covenant, many will find it difficult to place you with any caste. That's because our castes are based greatly on race. You are human; you are the enemy and most will treat you that way, as a prisoner of war, unless you show them that you are otherwise. For that reason, before anyone else can know of you, I will teach you to show them something different, something they know how to react to. I will teach you to be Sangheili."

1-2-3

1 Sava- this is a reference to the War of the Spider Queen series. Sava is a drow (if you don't understand don't worry) game much like chess but with a web shaped board and slightly different rules. Soldier is the equivalent of a pawn.

Well there it is Chapter 2. R&R, and please be nice.

### 3. Teacher

Well here we are again. Hello, Hello to all of you readers old and new, but it wasn't my idle banter that you've come for now was it. Well to bad, if you don't like it you can skip it. Anyways one important announcement, today July 9, 2005 is my sister's (Mistress of Azure) birthday, and so in honor of the occasion I dedicate this chapter to all the hard work she has put in for her stories (and mine (editing/proofreading)) over the last year. Well enough of the festivities on to the story.

Disclaimer: I DON'T OWN HALO (as I am forced to reminder myself every chapter.) All I own are my hopes, dreams, and my OC's.

Language (important this Chap.)

Covenant- plain text

Human- *italic text*

MC: 1400 hours, November 8, 2537

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara sat before the Computer terminal in Drek'nari's room, scanning through the reports that filtered in from the search parties. The data was almost two days old before it dropped down to her clearance level. Fulsamee had seen to it that she had that much, but that was ok; she was just using it to study after all. At least, that's what she told Drek'nari. He didn't need to see how desperate she was to hear about what was going on outside the Ascendant Justice. Though she suspected he knew more than she would have liked him to.

For the last month this had been her home. She lived here with Drek'nari as he taught her the ways of the Covenant. For the most part she hadn't left this room since arriving and she had stayed hidden from the rest of the Covenant on board thanks to an active camo belt Drek'nari had procured from the ships armory. Even with the belt, however, she needed to be careful when moving around the ship; the Covenant knew their technology far better than humans did and most could recognize the telltale shimmer that announced that someone in active camo was moving. It was infuriating having to stay cooped up here, but she could see the necessity and hadn't complained much.

She realized that was idly fingering the slim silver band on her wrist. She sighed as she looked at it, the last link to her old life. The bracelet had been a gift from Kelly, the first friend she had made upon arriving on Nexus V. She had always thought the thing gaudy and had rarely worn it; back then she hadn't needed a constant reminder of her best friend. Now she wore it constantly, along with a simple golden ring that had been her mothers; they had been the two things she had insisted on getting when Drek'nari had taken her back to the Human barracks to get some extra clothes.

Kara sighed haply and smiled a little as she realized that her thoughts had not conjured the voices. The voices, her own guilt and fear given life by an overactive imagination, had plagued her waking hours for the better part of the last month, but they were nothing beside the nightmares that had stopped only two days ago. Turning back to the terminal, she buried that line of thought. It was bad enough that she had broken in front of Drek'nari once already.

Her eyes once more began to scan the reports as they were released or filed. None seemed of any importance or interest, an annoying trend that had persisted for almost a week. Then something caught her eye; the report of one 'Dek', an Unggoy and the demolitions expert for one search party, concerning finds within forerunner ruins. Quickly she opened the report and read it through. The group had been doing a routine search for the ruins when they had stumbled upon a small group of human survivors. A firefight had ensued and Dek had been one of two survivors. The other, an elite, had died shortly after from his wounds.

Kara felt a pang of grief as she read the casualty figures, then a

wash of guilt as she realized whom the grief had been for. She was still human, she told herself; no matter what she had to do to survive she was still human. She would never be one of them, she promised herself that. She would never forget what they had done, and more importantly she would never forgive them.

The door hissed open and Kara snapped back to reality. Drek'nari stepped inside and the door slid shut. In one hand he carried a tray of food, in the other he held a small crystal disk. Setting the tray down on the desk, he pulled a second chair up to the desk. "Found anything useful today?" Kara held her composure as best she could; and to her credit, she did refrain from asking how long he had known.

"What makes you think I'm looking?"

Drek'nari gave the Sangheili equivalent of a smile. "Because unless humans really are as different as Unggoy believe, I know our kind."

"Our kind?" Kara knew at this point that arguing was futile; if he wanted the information he would get it, but after her promises to herself only moments before she did not appreciate being in any sort of grouping with any of them.

"Yes, our kind. I've know you for little more than a month, but everything you've shown me says that you and I are more alike than you believe. We are the kind of beings that are never satisfied with our situation unless it is as we would have it, and your situation is far from ideal. Unless I miss my guess, you're not satisfied with sitting here being told what to learn."

Kara sighed in frustration; this was not the first time Drek'nari had shown her that he knew her as well as she knew herself. That was not the worst part in her mind, she could accept that he knew her that well. What she could not accept is that she couldn't hate him for it. She had tried many times over the last month; when the voices would rear their heads and throw images at her she could hate every Covenant she could think of, but whenever her thoughts came to Drek'nari she found her temper iced and hate slipping from her grasp. Kara understood why, she had stumbled upon the answer some time ago, but the answer only made her want to hate him more. The simple truth was he reminded Kara of her father.

"Not really." She said, and gestured to the hologram that served as the screen. "They found what they were looking for, but they can't get in." He didn't move, being able to see the hologram just fine from where he was; the terminal projected the hologram in all directions with equal clarity, and in such a way that no view interfered with any of the others. The end result made the hologram appear to track your movements as you moved around the room. "But you already knew that, didn't you? This is at least 2 days old."

He nodded not appearing to notice or care that she had slipped back into her native tongue. "Yes I did, but what's important is that you found it, you have a good eye for details." He reached across the desk to hand the disk to her.

Kara sighed for what seemed like the hundredth time since Drek'nari had returned and took the disk "What's this?"

"A message from the Fleet Master."

As calmly as she could, Kara placed the disk in the terminal's reader and waited for the message that had been a month coming. "The meeting with the hierarchs wentâ€¦ well. They have said they will think on my request, and will contact me once they reach a conclusion. Drek'nari, make sure she is ready, the hierarchs could call for her at any time." The recording ended at that. There was nothing else, but both Kara and Drek'nari noticed that Orna' had taken care not to mention the alternative. Either he was confident that the Hierarchs would agree or he was very afraid they would not.

As Kara ran over the message in her head her emotions began to lean more towards anger and less towards fear. For the last month her grief had made her life a living hell. Now, she may have finally won out against it, and it still might all be for nothing. No. She would not die. She had to live, live and remember. When she turned to Drek'nari there was fire in her eyes. He returned her gaze and clicked his mandibles in satisfaction. "I was right, we are alike. It is good to see you haven't given up yet." Kara smiled. She would never give up. Not while there was still a chance to live.

1-2-3

Yes, Yes I know short, but I promise more soon. So until then, bu-bye

#### 4. Jugement

As promised here's another chapter, but first legal feces.

Disclaimer: NO OWN HALO.

Judgment

MC: 2000 Hours, January 16, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara stared nervously at the board in front of her. Not that she was nervous over something as small as a gameâ€¦not this game anyway. It was the larger, longer waiting game that had her worried. It had been more than a two months since the Fleet Masters last message. Something should have come by now, whether it was a call to trial for Drek'nari and Orna' or an invitation for a meeting with the Hierarchs. Something should have happened.

Kara sighed, a nasty habit that came forward all too often as of late, and decided to end the game of Sava she was playing with her friend and teacher. She leaned over and moved her honor guard forward a few steps, closing the carefully laid trap around Drek'nari's high prophet. Drek'nari studied the board a moment longer before realizing the game was over. "Well played," he said, leaning over to offer a hand in congratulations. Kara grasped it momentarily then returned the gesture in the Sangheili manner. Placing her hands palm up she offered them to Drek'nari who placed his own hands palm down over

hers.

As they moved to clean up the game, Drek'nari casually asked a question of the same sort he had been asking for the last week. "Why did you not offer congratulations first?"

Mentally checking a sigh, Kara answered. "The defeated always offers the first congratulations, for the victor to do so would flaunt his victory and dishonor him." Every thing was a test now. The simplest interactions could raise dozens of questions, all designed to keep her understanding of Covenant ways sharp.

A week ago, Drek'nari had deemed her as ready as he could make her for the impending meeting with the Hierarchs. Now all there was to do was to wait. "Exactly," he replied as they finished the cleaning up the game. Glancing at the chronometer the terminal was projecting in its idle state, he realized how late it was. "We should sleep now. The Hierarchs will not be kept waiting for a silly little thing like sleep if their message comes tomorrow."

Kara laughed as she shut the terminal down and moved to her bed. After turning off the lights Drek'nari climbed into his own bunk and settled in for the night. As she drifted to sleep, Kara's last thoughts were that this life might not be so bad after all.

1-2-3

Kara floated through darkness. Darkness that spread out forever as far as the mind could imagine, but it was a darkness different than the one she remembered from her nightmares. It was simply that; darkness, the lack of light. Not the endless, unyielding blackness that had dominated her dreams not long before. As this realization dawned on her, the darkness gave way to light, and a scene she knew well reached out to envelop her.

She stood in a field a few kilometers from her family's house. Her father had the day free and so the family had come here to have a picnic lunch. She stood beside her father as they lined up twin rifles to fire at distant wooden targets. Behind her, fifty or so meters away, her mother and best friend Kelly set up lunch under the sprawling branches of a stand of trees. It was perfect, just the way it had been for 5 long happy years. Something was missing though, she couldn't quite place it, but something that should have been here wasn't. Turning, she found the missing piece to this beautiful puzzle. A short ways away, Raul sat beneath another ancient tree. The full image that met her eyes though, was unexpected. Sitting across a Sava board from Raul was someone who could have never shared this with her. Drek'nari could have never been in this scene, but still he belonged here. Here with the rest of her family.

Kara relaxed and let the dream whisk her away. It was a dream; she knew that deep down in her conscious mind—but dreams were the realm of the subconscious and the imagination. So for the time being she was content to let her fantasies take hold, content to be safe with her family. Both the one she had lost and the one she had found.

1-2-3

MC:0715 Hours, January 17, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Flagship Truth and Reconciliation

By the time dawn came the next morning, Fleet Master Orna' Fulsamee was already up and about. Today was the day. The day he found out if the risk he had taken three short months earlier paid off or if it all came to ruin.

Two months ago he had managed to obtain a private audience with the High Prophet of Truth. The meeting had had only one purpose: to convince Truth that the human child he had saved was strong enough and, perhaps more importantly, worthy of joining the covenant when the rest of her species was scheduled for death. The meeting had been a success; although Truth had kept that fact well hidden until a few short hours ago. Now he could only hope that Drek'nari had succeeded as well. For all of their sakes, the child's included, Orna' hoped that he had.

1-2-3

MC:0700 Hours, January 17, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara awoke with the dawn as she often did; an annoying habit when the time of dawn could move as much as three hours during the year. She found Drek'nari already gone, he rarely slept more than eight hours, and so she climbed out of bed and went to the terminal. Turning it on, she logged into the Fleet-wide battle-net and began to scan the reports as she had every day since she had learned how. Her search ended abruptly as she saw the report on the top of the list; our glorious High Prophet of Truth graces us with his presence, victory and salvation shall be ours. Her blood froze. Truth was here and the waiting game was over. Her stomach tied in knots as all her fear and doubt rushed to the front of her mind.

Taking a deep breath, she stood and began to pace the length of the room, as she did she worked through her doubt. When she met the Prophet, surely if the Prophet had decided against her she would already be dead, she would have to keep her wits about her. She continued to pace the room and systematically squashed her doubts, or at least shoving them aside. Doubt was for later if at all, now she needed to think clearly. She continued her pacing until the door slid open with a familiar hiss.

Kara spun to face the door almost expecting armed guards to be waiting outside. It was just Drek'nari however, much to her relief. He stepped inside, looking, in his own calm way, relieved that she was still there. He glanced briefly at the terminal before sitting down and turning to her. "Good, you already know. Be ready. We'll have an answer soon." After a moment, Kara took up the other chair and placed the Sava board in between them. She needed something to take her mind off the prophet and a game seemed like the ideal distraction. Drek'nari appeared to agree and quickly set up his black metallic forces.

The game moved quickly, neither player putting much thought behind their moves. So when the door opened once more, they had already come close to the end game, Kara's Arbiter stood with two honor-guards,



facing down Drek'nari's Prophet and a pair of shield bearers. The pair stood silently to face a pair of elites in black armor. "The Hierarch requests your presence." One of the elites said, looking only slightly surprised at finding a human here. Another soldier dancing unquestioningly to the prophets song. Kara and Drek'nari followed their escort out of the room leaving their game as it stood.

Two more elites joined them outside and led them towards the hangar. The group proceeded silently through the halls of the cruiser. Kara and Drek'nari asked no questions when they saw the halls empty and their guards gave no answers. The procession arrived at the hangar without incident. The hangar was empty like the rest of the ship except for a single Phantom that stood alone near the exit to the hanger. Surrounding it were another dozen elites in black armor.

1-2-3

MC: 1000 Hours, January 17, 2538

In orbit above Nexus V

The Phantom cruised through orbit, moving silently towards its destination. Ahead of them a figure became distinct against the void. The ship, for it was a ship of sorts, began in a giant dome then tapered down to a point. As Kara looked on she couldn't help but gape. It was enormous; it must be two thousand kilometers from top to bottom and over a thousand kilometers across. One of their escorts noticed her look and spoke up, pride and contempt thinly veiled in his voice, \_"You are right to be in awe of the Holy City. It is a testament to the power of the Forerunners and the wisdom of the Hierarchs. You should feel blessed, you will be the first and last human ever to set foot within its hallowed walls."\_

Kara glanced at Drek'nari out of the corner of her eye. He caught her eye in the same manner and gave a tiny nod. It was time to see how well she had learned. "I know." She said simply, letting a small amount of the awe she felt creep into her voice. "The Holy City, High Charity. Wherein the High Council of the Covenant meets, and where the Hierarchs make their residence. It also holds the Mausoleum of the Arbiter where every arbiter that has ever served the Covenant sleeps, including the first arbiter who ended the fighting between the Prophets and the Sangheili. It is where Akrani Vi'lentet first spoke the Writ of Union, bonding the Sangheili as the honor guard of the Prophets and forming the first Covenant," she finished. Falling silent, she let the escort contemplate her words. It was part the first history a young Sangheili would learn. More importantly, she had delivered it in their language.

Most of the elites surrounding her refused to meet her eyes so she could not judge her success, but one did meet her eyes briefly and his green orbs showed her all she needed to know. His look, where there would have been open contempt and distrust, showed contemplation. He didn't know what to think, but more importantly she was no longer just a human. She was something different now, something different and maybe something more.

The Phantom docked with High Charity a few minutes later and the whole procession, now sixteen strong, left the ship and proceeded to

the high council chamber. Most of the journey was spent on a gravity lift that took the group half the length of the city, dropping them a short way away from the council chambers. The rest of the journey was on foot from the public lift to the doors of the great council chambers. At the steps to the chambers their escort was exchanged for a different one composed of four elites in crimson armor with golden decorations and an elaborate helmet. Each one carried a spear taller than him and tipped with a half a meter long plasma blade. They also carried a plasma rifle and sword at their waist.

When they reached the doors leading into the chambers Kara wasn't surprised when Orna' joined them. He stepped into formation with Drek'nari, one on each side of her and a half a step ahead. The honor guards left them inside the council chambers and took up guard near the entrance. This left the three of them crossing the final distance of the council floor alone, and even though the risers that normally would have held the rest of the high council were empty, all three felt as though the full council was assembled there and every eye watching them. The silence in which they approached Truth was oppressive, and even Drek'nari felt as though he were being judged. Atop a small rise at the end of the room a solitary figure hovered. Truth sat within his customary hover seat awaiting the group. They stopped atop a smaller rise in the middle of the room, Fulsamee and Zoultel knelt before the prophet, and after a moments hesitation Kara knelt as well.

"Welcome." Truth intoned softly, sounding for all the world that this meeting could not, and should not have been the most important thing on the minds of the three before him. "Your success here is to be commended, Fleet Master. Though it is unfortunate that the forerunner structure remains closed, but I am sure you will find the solution soon." The way Truth said this, it was clear that Fulsamee would find it if he intended things to remain as they were.

"Yes, Hierarch." Orna' did his best to keep the nervousness out of his voice. Why was Truth doing this? Why not just pass judgment and be done with it? Why make them sweat? Did he expect the child to break if he waited long enough? Was he toying with them all, seeing which of them would crack first? All very real possibilities, given what Orna' had seen other prophets do.

The prophet continued, moving to the next member of the trio. "Commander Drek'nari Zoultel, I have heard much about you." Truth said smoothly, never raising his voice or giving any indication that this was more than simple meeting between friends. "A highly respected and successful commander, but you have been occupied with other things these last few months. Have you not?"

"Yes, Hierarch." Drek'nari said in a level voice. He never let anyone see that he was afraid or shaken, which he was. Well, at least not since his talk with Kara when she awoke on that first day three months past.

Truth waited a moment longer, letting silence envelop the room once more before moving on to the final member of the group. "But it is you child, that I have heard the most of." With this he tapped a button on the arm of his chair. The air between them shimmered as the chambers holographic projectors sprang to life. Three stocky figures charged a fourth. The taller figure drew a knife and proceeded to slay its attackers with savage precisions. The hologram froze as the

image of Kara pressed a plasma pistol to an unfortunate grunts face. "An impressive display even for a last attempt at life. Deserving of recognition perhaps?" As he spoke he looked from Kara to her image and back. Looking at the hologram one last time, he made it vanish. "That, it seems is what we are here to discover."

Gesturing to her, the prophet spoke again. "Rise, human, and make your case. You have shown well enough that you are strong, but now you must prove to me that you are worthy." Once more his voice never rose nor faltered, his voice, and for that matter his face, was empty of emotion.

Kara stood and faced the prophet, wishing that her stomach would stop its acrobatics. She summoned all of the calm she could and remembered Drek'nari's final advice over their last game. "Show no fear. If you can manage that, what you say will matter less. The face you show the Hierarch will be the first thing he will judge you on, aside from your conduct while he speaks. Remember, fear is an ally as long as we control it, the moment it controls us is the moment we die."

"High Prophet of Truth, I have nothing to offer except myself and my deeds. I could tell you I am worthy, but in the end it will be my actions that tell if I am. I would, with your blessing, join this Covenant and prove my worth. Please give me a chance to prove myself." When she finished Kara bowed deeply and knelt once more. For a long time Truth said nothing and instead, sat looking at Kara and the two who now knelt behind her.

Finally, he spoke and his voice showed it's first shred of emotion. "You have taught her well, Commander Zoultel. Come forward, child and I shall teach you The Writ of Union. Then you shall be one of us, bound by your honor and our trust forever."

Kara walked to the base of the dais and knelt, before Truth could speak she began. "So full of hate were our eyes; that none of us could see; our war would yield countless dead, but never victory. So let us cast arms aside; and like discard our wrath; thou, in faith, will keep us safe; whilst we find the pathâ€¦" When she had finished the Writ of Union and the oath of the covenant that followed she remained on her knee waiting for Truth to speak.

When Truth next spoke it was in a whisper. "Yes, you have taught her very well." Turning his attention to Kara, he completed the ritual. "Rise Kara Zoultel, welcome home." Her surprise was visible as she rose. She had given no surname during her oath and hadn't expected Truth to provide one. Drek'nari's surprise was no less clear, if somewhat less obvious. Truth was quick to supply an answer to the confusion. "As she was yours to train, so shall she be yours to raise. Now, you may wait outside. I need to speak with the Fleet Master a moment longer."

1-2-3

Outside, the two of them stood in silence, both just now making sense of the prophet's last words. Kara was the first to break the silence, though she did so in a whisper meant only for her ears. "I was right, he did belong." This was enough to break the silence and open the conversation though and it did.

"You did it." It was all Drek'nari could manage under the

circumstances.

"That last bit, what Truth said. I guess that makes you my father now. Adopted father at least." Drek'nari thought she sounded pleased.

"I suppose it does," he said, unsure what that meant or what to feel about it. He had never had any children; his life mate, for he had had one many years ago, had died to illness soon after they had bonded.

It was Kara who solved the dilemma. Offering her hands palm up, she smiled. She had never been one to get emotional in public and her relation with Drek'nari already resembled the one she had shared with her father, so she saw no reason to change anything. Drek'nari returned the gesture and offered his own smile, understanding her silence as well as he would words.

When Fulsamee joined them a few minutes later, he was deep in thought. The trio descended the steps of the council chambers, each wrapped in a cloak of silence and content with their own thoughts. Outside, the twin suns rose across the horizon of Nexus V, a dawn that held the promise of the future.

1-2-3

And there you have it! Another chapter bites the dust. Tune in next time same place, and obviously not the same time or else I'd be on some kind of schedule.

Lord forbid.

## 5. First Contact

Here is the last chapter I will post for quite some time. School is starting and I won't be able to write much.

Disclaimer: NO OWN HALO

First Contact

MC: 0600 Hours, January 18, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara woke early fully intending to accompany Drek'nari to the morning meal, which before now she had been forced to eat within the confines of the room she shared with her now adopted father. As she began to change, she noticed with satisfaction that for once she had beaten Drek'nari out of bed.

The clothes into which she changed were not the human clothes she had worn the past three months, instead she donned loose fitting pants and a sleeveless shirt made of a black material that felt like silk. The clothes had been waiting along with her identification disk when she and Drek'nari had returned from the meeting with Truth. Though she could only wonder how they had been fitted. She completed her outfit by tying her hair, which now hung down to her shoulders, up with a short length of black cloth. Drek'nari had said she should cut

it short before she joined the academy, but that wouldn't be for another week or so.

When she had finished she sat down in one of the two chairs and tried to untie the knot that was forming in her stomach as her elation subsided. Any number of things could go wrong. Her first meeting with the rest of the crew meant the whole crew; Brutes and jackals included. From what she had been told these races looked down on others more than any other. These thoughts were not helping her calm down, and she steadied herself as she realized she was fingering the silver band on her wrist. Taking a deep breath she told herself it would be all right, she had done well with Truth. She would be able to gain acceptance with the others.

"You're up early." The voice of her new father had a remarkable way of calming her nerves. Very much like the way her human father had.

"Or maybe you're up late." She countered, finally at ease.

Drek'nari laughed while he pulled on an outfit similar to hers, though in deep navy blue with silver highlights. "The day I sleep late is the day the Covenant breaks." They shared a laugh as he finished dressing then they picked up their ID disks and left for the public mess.

Together they walked down the nearly deserted halls of the cruiser, it was early and many were taking advantage of being able to sleep in. The few Sangheili that they did pass greeted Drek'nari with a nod or a friendly remark, and then their eyes would be inevitably drawn to Kara, a human dressed in Sangheili clothing walking easily besides a well-known officer. Kara's presence never drew comment however. Some would look darkly at her or direct a questioning glance at her companion, but most seemed to understand that this was, for whatever reason, the will of the prophets.

Minutes passed as they wound their way through the ship, and as each one passed Kara's anticipation and dread grew. This was it; there was no turning back now. Finally they reached the doors to the mess. The doors slid open with a pleasant hiss as they approached; inside it looked almost identical to the cafeterias Kara had eaten in during the brief struggle for Nexus V. Rows of long tables lined the space hovering a little more than a meter off the floor. Dozens of chairs in a variety of styles occupied each table, most of them were like the ones in Drek'nari's cabin or a squat backed long legged style that Kara assumed were for the shorter grunts and jackals. At one end of the hall three or four-dozen chairs of another style sat empty, the chairs were low, wide, and sturdy. When questioned, Drek'nari explained in hushed voice that the chairs were built for the small attachment of Jiralhanae that had been assigned to the Ascendant Justice despite the best efforts of both Ship Master Jue'ren and Fleet Master Fulsamee. The Jiralhanae were the youngest race in the covenant, having joined just a few local decades ago, but already a deep animosity had sprung up between the two races. "They'll learn their place soon enough," Drek'nari said with chuckle, "we've led the covenant armadas since the covenant was formed. We are the vanguard of the great journey and the Jiralhanae will learn that soon enough."

Kara laughed softly and started to respond but stopped short as a

sound reached her ears. The mess wasn't full by a stretch, but there were enough occupants for the word to begin to ripple through the room. As Kara and Drek'nari proceeded down the center isle towards the dispenser at the other end of the room they were noticed. Conversation halted as the people lining the center stopped to look at the pair before turning back to their companions to wonder what the meaning of this could be. Word spread slowly but by the time they reached the end of the isle every Sangheili table was abuzz with the whispers. No one understood why a human was here, but everyone knew better than to question what could only have been the word of the prophets.

Kara did her best to ignore the whispers as she examined the food dispenser. It consisted of a small terminal and holo screen on which an order was placed and a niche in the wall where the food was delivered automatically by a small gravity lift. After collecting her meal Kara followed Drek'nari towards a nearly empty table in the corner. Three Sangheili were the only other people sitting at the table and Drek'nari made straight for them. Each one wore a similar expression, something almost, but not entirely, unreadable. In fact the only thing Kara could make out for sure was that they all seemed unsurprised by her presence. Drek'nari approached the table with the same easy loping gait that he always used, unfazed by anything he saw in the eyes of the three companions and Kara was forced to follow or be left behind.

Drek'nari sat down facing the three and Kara plopped down next to him. For a moment there was silence while the three sized up the two and the two did likewise. Finally the Sangheili sitting in the center of the three broke into a grin. "So the great commander Zoultel comes crawling back to his friends."

"Yes, he finally realized that he's no better than us and that consorting with fleet masters won't change that." Another added drawing a laugh from his companion.

Drek'nari talked easily with his two friends replying to their jokes in turn. Kara watched from the side content to let the conversation take its course, which happened to be away from her. However the Sangheili sitting across from her didn't seem content to ignore the stranger in their midst.

"Enough stalling!" He blurted out, just managing to keep his voice down. "I don't know about you, but I want to know what's the meaning of this." He practically spat the last word and pointed an accusing finger at Kara. "It's a human."

The Sangheili furthest from Kara laughed before responding. "Only genetically Sivo, if half of what we've heard is true." Kara looked at the one who was defending her. His face wore a perpetual grin and she recognized the playful glint of a troublemaker and a joker in his golden eyes.

"I don't care what we have or haven't heard Orli, it's still a human. At best it's just a Kig-yar amongst Unggoy." Sivo replied angrily.

Drek'nari might have intervened if she had waited a moment longer, but Kara had decided it was time to take a stand. "What exactly have you heard?"

Sivo looked at her like he had just realized he had a plasma grenade on him, Orli however looked pleased that she had joined the conversation. Although Kara suspected he could have looked pleased to be in front of a firing squad. "Well, some of your escorts from last night let slip under "gentle" persuasion the details of your conversation in route to High Charity." As he spoke his grin grew and Kara got the impression that he did this sort of thing a lot. "Didn't get much from the tight jawed Honor Guards though."

"You didn't get much from them because by the time they started talking you had them so drunk that they were starting to pass out." The middle one jibed in a slightly disgusted, slightly amused tone.

"Ha, you're just jealous that your idea to get them to talk didn't work Jinol." Orli said offhandedly. "Anyway what we did get before the big guys passed out was that you already knew the Writ of Union." He sounded as though he were talking to a good friend about old times. Maybe this wouldn't be so hard, Kara mused.

Kara started to respond but was cut short by a deep voice behind her. "What's this we have here? I wasn't aware that the Hierarchs encouraged keeping pets." Three voices laughed deeply at the leaders comment. This was the meeting Kara had been dreading the most, of all the races in the covenant the Jiralhanae were most likely to challenge her appointment to the covenant. She searched desperately for something to say, somehow to respond but she found nothing. Neither Drek'nari nor herself had foreseen this meeting happening so soon.

She was spared having to respond by Drek'nari, who knew she wasn't ready to confront the Jiralhanae yet. "Leave us be Gortek, you are not welcome here."

"Ha, I go where I please." Gortek sneered, "and now I think I'd like to see what your precious pet is made of. Turn and face your better." Kara did no such thing, turning would mean showing the Brute the fear she could not hide. Her refusal however, did not sit well with the Brute. "I said turn around, you insolent little whelp." Laying a massive hand on her shoulder Gortek began to force Kara around.

With hardly a thought for the consequences she reacted; grabbing the knife from her tray, she stabbed the Brute between his fingers. After that everything happened at once; Gortek reared back and ripped the knife from his hand, Kara slipped from her chair and dove under the table to the other side and Drek'nari and the other Sangheili rose from their chairs and moved to stop the enraged Brutes. Roaring in feral rage, Gortek and the other Brutes leapt across the table, Drek'nari followed the Brutes across, taking one of the Brutes in the back as he came across. Orli jumped on the fallen Brute while Sivo and Jinol wrestled the second one to the ground. As soon as he landed Drek'nari tackled Gortek to the ground and placed him in a headlock, but not before Gortek managed to land a backhanded slap that sent Kara sprawling.

The fight had drawn the attention of the rest of the hall and dozens of Sangheili converged on the sight to see the cause. As a circle closed around the combatants, Gortek and his cronies began to settle realizing that they were far outnumbered. Rising from his position

atop Gortek, Drek'nari moved to Kara's prone form. Scooping her up he pushed his way through the forming crowd. A low whisper followed him as the members of the crowd began to speculate or demand answers from the three he had left the seen. A few asked him what had happened as he passed. To these he answered simply that Kara had stabbed Gortek and he had attacked her. Let them figure the rest out on their own.

As he wound his way through the corridors Drek'nari couldn't help but sigh, Kara certainly knew how to make a splash. He wondered what would come of this. On one hand, she had left a lasting impression on the Sangheili.

On the other hand, she had left a lasting impression of the Jiralhanae.

1-2-3

MC: 1000 Hours, January 18, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

"I'm telling you, she could be out for hours still. Just leave the message and go." Drek'nari's voice pierced the pain that filled Kara's head. She felt like she had been run down by a Warthog.

"Regardless, I was instructed to deliver the message to her." This second voice was a guttural, high-pitched whine that sounded vaguely familiar. "The fleet master was very specific." At this latest information Kara sat up, suddenly not drowsy anymore. Even as she did she wished she hadn't, a splitting pain ripped through her skull and she uttered a few well-picked curses in her native tongue.

After recovering from the pain in her head Kara took a look around and found herself back in the cabin she shared with her adopted father. Drek'nari sat on a chair at the terminal facing the owner of the other voice who turned out to be a grunt of unremarkable stature. Standing a head shorter than the average grunt he looked somewhat comical in his slightly too big armor. Taking a long look at him Kara understood why he had sounded familiar.

"You were here that first day." This was the quiet grunt that had been there when she had woken up three months ago. The small creature seemed surprised by the recognition and nodded silently.

"Well she's awake now, you can deliver your message." Drek'nari offered.

"Oh, yes." The diminutive grunt waddled over and offered Kara a small crystal disk. "Fleet Master Fulsamee told me to give this to you." Kara took the disk and watched as the messenger scurried out of the room.

"Who was that?" Kara asked standing and moving to the other chair.

"He is called Dek, he's a demolitions expert that was transferred to my squad recently." Drek'nari answered as she placed the disk in the terminal. Soon a small holographic message played from the



terminal.

"Kara, Drek'nari, meet me at the following coordinates as soon as possible. There will be a Phantom waiting for you in the hanger of the Ascendant Justice." After the message a set of coordinates flashed across the air between them.

Without a word, Kara grabbed the disk from the terminal as Drek'nari began to shut it off. Slipping it into her pocket she followed him though the door and out into the corridors.

1-2-3

MC: 1017 Hours, January 18, 2538

Nexus V, 37 Kilometers Northeast of the Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Drek'nari landed the Phantom on a rock-strewn ledge indicated by Orna's coordinates. As the craft settled he saw Orna's Banshee sitting off to the side of the ledge. As Kara descended the gravity lift behind Drek'nari she wondered what it was the Fleet Master could want. A glance around the ledge revealed a cave entrance, it looked natural enough but Kara could see signs of digging equipment.

They found the Fleet Master waiting a short distance inside the cave; he rose smoothly as they approached. "Good, you're here. Follow me." With that he started off into the depths of the cave. An hour came and went as the small procession wound it's way down into the heart of the mountain. The cave proceeded steadily downward and it quickly became apparent that little of this tunnel had been formed naturally. Walls quickly became smooth and uniform; the ceiling was without formations or variation, and the floor smooth and steady in its decent.

Finally the slope leveled off and small chamber opened up in front of them. The chamber looked more like a pocket in the stone, like something had come and scooped out a ten-meter sphere right out of the middle of the mountain. The walls were blacked and charred however, and after a closer inspection Kara realized the walls were plasma scarred, and the whole chamber looked like the walls had melted and cooled. She looked around again, taking in the whole cavern, and then she saw it. Near the bottom of the crater was the start of a set of stairs. Following them up she could just make out the outline of a door on the edge of her vision.

After so long in silence Kara jumped when Drek'nari spoke. "Is thatâ€|?"

"Yes, the Forerunner ruins that we found here." Fulsamee answered

"But, what happened here?" His gesture encompassed the entire cavern.

"When the doors remained locked despite our best attempts, it was decided by the Sangheili in charge of the dig that a small anti matter charge should get it open. Obviously it didn't."

"Then why are we here, and what did you want her for?"

"Because the only thing we know about these ruins is that they will only open for a certain genetic signature. When the search party came in contact with the locking mechanism, they were told that the offered bio-signature did not match and that it would await a re-claimer signature. So far a human genetic signature is the only know signature that hasn't been tried."

Kara listened to the conversation calmly, already suspecting that her father would relent; not that he had much choice if the Fleet Master decided to pull rank. As she listened she continued to study the stairs and the door at their peak. Tiny lights framed the door and cast a weak glow over the area but eventually Kara could make out a panel about 20 cm high and half as wide. She assumed this was the locking mechanism that the Fleet Master had spoken of. Looking over, she watched as Drek'nari broke down and gave in to the inevitable.

"And the Hierarchs?"

"Truth agrees. She's one of us now and so there's no reason she shouldn't try."

"Then I guess we should get this over with."

Drek'nari followed the Fleet Master down into the room and Kara fell into step behind him. As he mounted the final step, the Fleet Master pointed out the panel to Kara and told her what to do. She walked over to the small panel and placed her palm on it as she had been instructed. There was a bright light and a sharp pain in her fore finger as the mechanism scanned her and took a tissue sample. After a moment a bright mechanical voice played over an intercom. "Physical and genetic markers within standard deviation, match confirmed. Welcome re-claimer."

Kara stepped back as the doors opened with a barely audible hiss. Behind the doors lay a well-lit, pristine hallway in polished white; at the far end of the hall lay a second set of doors. After a moments hesitation, the Fleet Master flashed her a smile and stepped over the threshold.

"Warning, unauthorized entry. Purge immediately." The Fleet master jumped back outside and watched from a safe distance as a half a dozen sleek robots hovered out of compartments in the ceiling. They floated in formation facing the door but otherwise made no move to "purge" the offending organisms now that it was outside the facility. After a few short moments the doors at the other end of the hall opened and another, smaller robot floated though. Floating right up to the doorway it swiveled to face the Fleet Master.

"What have you done with the re-claimer?" it's mechanical voice rising to a shrill, panicking whine. Kara let herself a small laugh as she stepped into the things line of sight. Now it tuned slightly to face her, it's single large "eye" focusing on her, the Fleet Master long forgotten. "Oh, there you are. Good, good. If you'll follow me I'll show you the way." It chimed in a content voice.

"What are you?" Kara asked, not quite ready to follow something that had just tried to kill one of her companions.

"I am 709 Culpable Theorem, I am the monitor of the 9th ascension facility." The monitor said waiting for Kara a short ways inside the facility.

"And what are those?" she asked pointing to the other floating robots.

"These are Medical Grade Sentinels. While not as powerful as the ones that serve on the primary installations, they are quite adequate for the purposes of this facility." The monitor did not seem to notice or care that Kara wasn't moving.

"What is the purpose of this facility?"

"This facility was constructed for the sole purpose of administering the ascension process."

"The ascension process?"

"The ascension process is a series of physical and mental augmentations designed to elevate the abilities of the subject far beyond what is possible naturally. Unfortunately volcanic activity within recent geological history has limited the supply of materials available in the facility. I'm afraid this facility is equipped to handle only one subject at this time."

Kara turned to her companions unsure of how to react to what she had just learned. For a moment all three sat in silence. In the end it was Drek'nari who voiced his opinion first. "You should go." Seeing the uncertainty on her face he elaborated. "It said that this process would enhance your natural abilities. When you enter the academy the one area where you will be at a severe disadvantage will be physical abilities, this may be a way to level the playing field."

"Is it safe?" Orna asked. Currently Kara was a soldier under his command and he wasn't about to waste her life if he could help it.

When Drek'nari had no answer it was 709 that provided one. "If I may interrupt, the ascension process is 99 successful, 1 margin of error accounts for mechanical failure. Also 95 of test subjects that received successful treatment came away with minor or no side effects. So, I believe the answerer to your quandary would be, yes the ascension process is safe."

Orna hesitated a moment longer before nodding his assent. Turning to Kara he motioned for her to follow the monitor. As she slowly entered the facility the monitor faced the two Sangheili one final time. "The re-claimer should be able to leave in two local weeks. I would ask that you return here at that time." With that the monitor floated after Kara the facility doors closing after him.

For a minute longer the two stood looking at the doors of the facility wondering if the young human that they had worked so hard to protect would be alright, on her own for the first time since they had met. After that they turned and began to wind there way up though the mountain, leaving Kara to face this alone.

There you have it Chapter 5. Now once again this will be the last chapter I'm able to post for a couple of months. I should be able to post chapter 6 some time around November-December, maybe earlier if you're lucky.

## 6. Boot

Alrighty then. Hello and welcome once more. I'm really sorry about the wait, when I referenced December in the last chapter it was honestly a joke. I had originally planned for late October, but as they say "the best laid plans of mice and menâ€¦". I ran into a rather annoying writers block and compounded with an attack by the Plot Bunnies I was hard pressed to get this chapter done. Well enough about me lets see about Kara.

1-2-3

Boot

1-2-3

MC: 1224 Hours, February 1, 2538

Nexus V, Outside Forerunner 9th Ascension facility

Drek'nari paced the chamber that held the entrance to the 9th ascension facility. It had been almost three hours since he had arrived to retrieve Kara, and so far there was no sign of either her or the monitor. It wasn't that he was worried about her; it was just that he didn't like to be kept waiting. Yes, that was it.

He continued to pace for a few more minutes before sitting down and as calmly as he could began to polish and inspect his pistol. A few more long minutes passed before the doors to the facility finally slid open. Drek'nari indulged a sigh of relief as he stood and walked to the door.

The monitor and Kara waited at the door. When Drek'nari came close enough he could see immediately a difference in the young human. She still wore her Sangheili clothing, but now they seemed small and snug on her, where previously they had hung loose. After a moment's contemplation he saw the difference, she had grown 6 inches. Looking closer he saw other differences, she was more muscled, though she held herself awkwardly, as if she didn't quite trust her legs. When he got really close he could see the most striking change, aside from the height. Her eyes were still the same striking crystal blue but with one difference, now slender golden veins ran through her irises.

Smiling he offered his hands face up, she returned the gesture in jerky unsteady motions, and smiled back. Drek'nari was concerned, but his fears were soon alleviated as the monitor spoke. "The re-claimer is recovering excellently, her mind still has to finish relearning to move her body with faster reflexes and stronger muscles. She should be completely recovered in a few more days." Drek'nari and Kara both thanked the monitor who replied simply. "It was an honor re-claimer." With that Drek'nari led the still unsteady Kara out of the mountain.

1-2-3

MC: 1304 Hours, February 1, 2538

Nexus V, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara stumbled into the room she shared with Drek'nari and lay down on the bed. She wasn't tired, but it was frustrating trying to move when your body didn't respond properly. It had been worse in the beginning, back then she couldn't even walk. 709 had assured her the side affects were perfectly normal and in a few more days she would be better than ever, but until then she knew she would be endlessly frustrated. Drek'nari had already left to inform Orna so she would be alone for a while. Closing her eye's she began to flex the only muscle she could without problems.

When she had awoken yesterday she had found among the physical effects of the process, there had been mental effects. She hadn't noticed at first but now it was clear to her that her memory, among other things, was sharper. Now that she knew it, she reveled in the sheer joy of being able to remember anything and everything with crystal clear perfection. She could look back and remember every word that had been said that first day. She smiled, this was one thing at least one thing she could appreciate about the process.

When Drek'nari returned an hour or so later he informed her that the Ascendant Justice would be leaving Nexus V tomorrow. In a few days she would see her first glimpse of the Sangheili home world, and shortly thereafter she would begin at the Sangheili training academy. For the first time Kara would meet Sangheili who were her own age. After a brief conversation, Drek'nari left Kara to her thoughts.

1-2-3

MC: 0503 Hours, February 6, 2538

In orbit above Sangheili home world; Sorelius, Aboard Covenant Cruiser Ascendant Justice

Kara looked at the hologram projected from the terminal on the desk. It showed the large planet beneath them as the Ascendant justice slowly orbited the world. Kara was immediately struck by the sheer size of the world, she had seen Nexus V from orbit, but Sorelius was clearly larger. When she asked Drek'nari, who was sitting next to her, he told her that Sorelius was about two and a half times as large as Nexus V was. When she asked about the difference in gravity, Drek'nari said that the gravity on the ship had been slowly changing over the course of the journey and it was now equal to that of the planet. It took a moment for Kara to come to grips with that fact, finally she brought her mind back to the image of the strange new world laid out before her. She let her gaze drift over the landscape as she saw it from orbit, she saw what looked like a massive forest, and drifting over the far horizon the edge of a massive ocean spun out of view.

For a few more minutes the pair silently watched the landscape move slowly across their view. Eventually the planet stopped moving across the screen as the Ascendant Justice slowed to match the rotation of

the planet. Moments later the cruiser began to slowly descend into the atmosphere of the planet below.

1-2-3

MC: 0636 Hours, February 6, 2538

Sorelius, Covenant Sangheili Academy

Kara followed her father through the quiet halls of the academy. It was still a few hours till dawn and the only ones they passed where the few senior students set to stand guard. Winding their way through the uppermost public level they came to a lift that would take them to the academy director's quarters. As they approached the lift the two guards on duty snapped to attention.

Kara handed her ID to one guard as Drek'nari handed his to the other. As they scanned the IDs both guards gave Kara a quizzical look that had become so familiar. They knew about the prophet's decree, but they were still curious as to the details. Kara for her part didn't stare but she did pay each of them a long searching look. From what Drek'nari had told her all the guards in the academy would be senior students in their 9th or 10th year. They wore black body suits under emerald green armor, with dark blue edges and three interlocking circles on their shoulders identifying them as belonging to this academy rather than one of the other two on Sorelius.

A moment later the guard handed her ID back and Kara followed Drek'nari into the lift. At the top they left the lift together and crossed the small waiting room to the doors of the Academy directors office. Another pair of guards stood at the door and came to attention as they approached. One guard keyed his COM and a second later the door opened with a smooth hiss.

Inside another pair of guards flanked the door, eyes silently appraising them. Once inside Kara let her eyes slide slowly around the room. It was small, about 6 meters square, but not cramped. Every thing was arranged in a way that spoke of control and readiness. One wall was occupied by what looked like 3 bookshelves that ran floor to ceiling. Ten neat rows filled with small crystal disks. A dozen blank monitors dominated the opposite wall. The last wall, opposite the entrance, held another door. The only furnishing in the room was a wide, ornate desk made out of the same violet material that served so many purposes for the covenant. Behind the desk sat a Sangheili in deep royal purple armor with golden edges. He wore no helmet and Kara could see clearly the long scar that ran from his temple to his top mandible, crossing his left eye.

As they entered, the academy director seemed preoccupied with the four holo-screens that were projected in front of him. For a long tense moment he stared at the screens, seemingly unaware of his guests, before tapping a few commands on one screen and letting them fade from the view. Now he turned his one eyed gaze on the two standing before him. Surprisingly he passed Kara over rather quickly and let his gaze settle on Drek'nari. A smile just flashing on his face he spoke in a deep rumbling voice. "Drek'nari Zoultel, well if this isn't a pleasant surprise. Honestly I thought it would take another decade to get you back here and teaching, it's not as though you're really needed on the front lines right now, and you don't seem interested in going any higher in rank."

"Commander Senik I never intended to teach, you know that." Drek'nari said shaking his head and sighing, a habit he had picked up from Kara. "Not, at least, until a week or so ago." He added under his breath glancing at his 'daughter'.

Senik caught the glance and got the gist of the muttering. "Yes, her actions have brought about some rather unorthodox changes."

For a moment the three sat in uncomfortable silence before Senik spoke again, this time addressing Kara. "So you're Kara Zoultel." He said the name as though he was trying to wrap his mind around the concept of this human as, at least officially, his former student's daughter. "I take it your father has informed about the academy." Once more he seemed confused by the relationship between the two. Kara ignored his unsettled tone and nodded, holding his gaze. After a moment he nodded and turned back to Drek'nari. "As the prophets decreed she has been added to the new class that will be starting in a few days, and you've been added to the list of teachers. I've already worked out a team that should adapt well to her. All that's left is to get her armor measured." He sounded causal now that he was talking to Drek'nari. "You can go down to the armory and take care of that tonight." Turning back to Kara he spoke gravely. "May the Forerunners watch over you, you'll need all the help you can get."

1-2-3

MC: 1042 Hours, February 9, 2538

Sorelius, Covenant Sangheili Academy

Kara let herself wander aimlessly through the sea of students filling the amphitheater. Today was the day that she started her training in the Sangheili academy. Absentmindedly she rubbed the back of one of her gloved hands feeling the smooth alloy plate that formed the back of her gauntlet. She was dressed in the same emerald green armor as every other student with the exception of her helmet, which was altered from the regular one to fit her.

Kara silenced a sigh as she heard yet another whisper permeated a group of students that she passed. In the little less than a month that she had been in the Covenant she had managed to be elevated into something larger than life, at least amongst the younger Sangheili. Kara had been surprised to say the least, but apparently kids were kids regardless of species.

Moving away from the latest group Kara wished that the director would arrive and get it over with. Drek'nari had told her that training would be fierce and direct; no punches would be pulled. Kara just wanted to get started. She couldn't stand all this waiting; she had waited long enough in the beginning.

Hearing footfalls behind her, Kara turned and watched as another student approached. She immediately noticed the grim look on his face. Next she noticed that he had easily 4 inches on her, although she was sure that with her enhanced muscles she could match him should anything start. Stopping a few feet from her the young sangheili addressed her with a superior tone and a vicious sneer. "So you're the human that everyone is so worked up about. I don't see why

the Prophets decided to spare you, you're nothing special."

Kara matched his glare with a carefully blank look; she didn't need this sort of thing right now. Glancing around Kara noticed with distress that they were far enough away from the rest of the students that if he wanted a fight he would probably get one. He noticed this as well and unfortunately for Kara he wasn't content to sit and speculate like the other students, he wanted to know first hand what this overdeveloped ape was capable of. "What, nothing to say? Or is it that you don't understand? Ha, well lets see if you fight any better than you talk." He punctuated his sentence with a fast left jab.

Kara was ready for it and dogged to her right, though even with her enhanced reflexes she only just managed to dodge the attack, and the kick that followed found its way into her side just below her chest plate, even as she dodged.

As Kara backed away feeling her bruised ribs she realized the error in her assumption. She could take him on even terms, but these weren't even terms. She was still adjusting to the greater gravity of the planet, he wasn't. Kara was spared further beating by the approach of a familiar figure dressed in purple and black armor.

"What's this all about?" Drek'nari asked.

Kara bit back a smile and replied respectfully. "Nothing sir." The other student's reply was similar and followed soon after.

"Good." Drek'nari said gruffly. "Come on, Commander Senik will begin soon." With that he walked off. A moment later Kara followed leaving her opponent to fume.

A minute later Commander Senik walked out onto a small stage at the front of the amphitheater and called for order. In a matter of moments every student was quieted and every eye was on the grizzled old commander. "Today you take your first steps down a long hard path. Today you cease to be children and start to become adults. When you leave this place you will be ready to forge your place amongst our covenant, but until then this is your whole world." He gestured expansively. "And we are the masters." He indicated the other instructors.

"From this moment on you entire existence depends upon your own abilities. Your ability to function alone, your ability to support a team, your ability to follow orders or perhaps your ability to give them. Your families' name and strength may have seen you this far but now **\*\*your\*\*** strength is all you have." The commander finished his speech and left the hall in silence for a moment before speaking once more.

Two more instructors stepped forward at the left and right of the stage. "Now, when your name is called leave by the appropriate door and follow your instructors directions when you reach the courtyard." The commander turned and headed for the courtyard himself. He stopped just short of the door and spoke one last time. "And good luck, before we're done with you you'll all need more than a little."



Kara watched with apprehension as the two instructors called out the names of the 180 students with practiced precision. The amphitheater was nearly empty when the instructor on the right called her name. Moving to the door Kara walked through a short tunnel that opened up into a massive courtyard. Once outside she was instructed to join the end of the far right of three lines that had been assembled in the courtyard.

A few more minutes passed while the last of the students joined the lines. Then the commander once more stepped up calling out in a loud clear voice. "Look sharp, eyes on me." As one, the 179 Sangheili and 1 human turned to face the commander who was standing to the right of the three lines.

"Excellent." Commander Senik said once all eyes were turned his way. Kara noted with a small amount of distress that his voice had an almost predatory quality now. "Now that we're all out here it's time to meet your cells. Each of you will be separated into a three-person cell. You've all been separated into three lines so I'm sure it doesn't take a genius to find your partners. Take a moment to get acquainted with them because for the next five years they will be your shadow and you will be theirs. You'll need to learn to rely on them and to trust them, because more often than not you'll be relying on them to save your ass and they'll be trusting you to do the same."

After he said this he paused and waited while every student turned to his or her cellmates. Kara followed suit and spun around. Directly behind her was a female sangheili that stood about an inch taller than her. She was thin and lithe with soft features. Her eyes were a striking shade of violet and looked a little surprised. Kara guessed that was because she had just found out she was partnered with "the human". After a moment Kara stepped forward and offered her hands palm up to the sangheili. The other student cocked her head to the side a bit and took on a quizzical look before smiling and returning the gesture.

Kara smiled glad that things were looking up, the last thing she needed was to have partners that distrusted her right off the bat. "Kara Zoultel." Kara offered.

"Ce'lin Fulsamee." Ce'lin replied.

Kara was more than a little shocked and it showed on her face and in her voice. "As in Fleet Master Orna' Fulsamee?"

"Yes, his sister is my mother. Do you know of him?" Ce'lin asked.

"Yes, I do. It's a long story." Kara replied as she glanced over Ce'lin's shoulder to see their other partner approaching. Kara felt the as if the entire world had darkened and was sure that someone somewhere was laughing. Approaching over from behind Ce'lin was the familiar form of the student who had attacked her earlier.

For the second time that day the two young ones sized each other up. He was well muscled and fit like most Sangheili with a strong jaw and hard eyes. Kara knew that she wasn't going to get anywhere if she and

him continued to be at each other's throats. Swallowing her pride she stepped forward and offered her hands palm up to him. "Well fought back there."

For a tense minute he didn't respond but continued to appraise her. Finally he returned the gesture. "Risesi Oi'mone." Kara cringed inwardly; the tone of his voice told her clearly that things weren't over between them. Catching Ce'lin's eye she looked to her partner with mock pleading. Ce'lin caught the meaning behind the gesture and shrugged.

'Great' Kara thought. 'I've already got an enemy and he's supposed to be my ally, and my other partner is telling me I'm on my own.' Turning back towards the Commander, Kara waited patiently, like a prisoner waiting for her sentencing. This was going to be a very long 10 years.

1-2-3

And that my friends is how they say La fin. I shall try to have the next chapter up much sooner than this one, hopefully around the end of January or early February. Until thenâ€¦I hope. Happy Nondenominational Winter Celebration.

End  
file.